INTRODUCTION

Art is not mere portrayal of an event—even though some events can be portrayed artistically. Art is an event itself. It is the change of consciousness which occurs that is signal. This movement of thought is the cause, not the result of the work before us.

So it is with "The Prison." A very good friend of mine expressed some concern about access. The words were something like, "Well, I like it well enough, but as a rule I don't like music playing while I'm reading." I use that reaction as an example because it was the first in a chain of similar reactions. If you should find yourself stumbling through the piece at first, perhaps knowing that you're not alone will help to incline you to persevere through a few more reading/listenings. Read slowly and carefully and listen the same way.

I have found that attending to two simultaneously occurring ideas takes some getting used to. At first it seems that I would attend to one and let the other figure as ambience and then the next time reverse the roles. Until finally after three or four listening/readings I was able to see both occurring distinctly and equally. It was that state of consciousness that provided thought with a new vista.

I am grateful to share this work with you and would like to point out that the source from which it is flowing has the splendid quality of being available to all.

Michael Nesmith

CHAPTER ONE

IT seemed like most prisons. The walls were dark and strong; the bars over each window were rusty in spots but secure. The difference was in the inmates. Most of them were happy. Occasionally even laughter would be heard in the dining hall or the main exercise yard. There were men and women inmates together. That helped some. And while continuous living together was not allowed, there was still the chance for some relations between the sexes. Love was common. But it was mostly physical love, for prison life was still prison life and the rigors of mere existence took their toll of the captives' more subtle senses. The prison sat like a square fortress in the middle of a weed-choked meadow. Only one road led to it. The main gate was iron and always guarded.

Les was one of the more noticeable prisoners: tall, athletic, gentle mannered. He was tanned from many shirtless volleyball afternoons. Most of the other prisoners liked Les. He was a favorite with the ladies, and his easy way made him a favorite with the guards as well. He had forgotten how long he had been in the prison. Long enough to know the ropes. It was the custom for the prisoners to operate the prison themselves pretty much as they wished. As a matter of fact, no one had actually seen the warden. It was Les's dream to become the prison leader. Often, in the evenings, he would talk about his dreams to his lady, Marie.

They had been together for a long time. Marie was entertained by Les's dreams of success and would let her mind wander with his over the privileges that would

be available to her as his lady.

Jason was transferred into the prison one day when it rained. Ponderous and moody, he was nonetheless possessed of a keen spirit and wit which made him likable to some. It wasn't long before Jason discovered the hole in the west wall. He noticed it one afternoon when he strayed from the rest of the inmates and their eternal games. It seemed unguarded. Jason stood startled. That such a break in the otherwise secure prison should exist with so much apparent unconcern from anyone struck him as strange. He peered through the hole but could only see a few yards. His vision was obscured by a mist which hung patiently outside.

Marie, noticing him alone and apart from the other prisoners, approached him curiously.

"What is this?" Jason asked her, dispensing with introductions and pointing to the break in the wall.

"You musn't go through there," she said. "Many people have, and they never return."

"I thought that was the point," Jason said. Marie pointed to the two grey guard towers, each with a menacing weapon pointed toward them.

"Les says that it is a trap to eliminate those among us who would try to escape and who cause trouble. Being so open and inviting is just a trick. Most of the old timers know about it."

"Les?" asked Jason.

"He's my old man," she said. Then she smiled.

"Oh," said Jason. "My name is Jason."

"Mine is Marie." Then Jason smiled.

As the days passed, Marie and Jason spent more and more time together. It wasn't long before Jason and Marie found themselves in love. Their conversations meandered through all the things that lovers try, but always Jason would come to the subject of the hole in the wall and its offer of freedom. Usually when he did, Marie would change the subject. On more than one occasion she walked away from him in disgust.

All the while Les became more and more suspicious of Jason and Marie, although Marie continued to deny any emotional involvement with Jason. Such lies caused her pain which she shared with

Jason, who seemed to understand.

One evening, during one of Jason and Marie's gentle conversations, he announced his decision to go through the hole in the wall. Marie did not reply.

"I have a hunch that it's okay," said Jason. "Will you come with me?"

Marie just looked at him. She had begun to trust him and his intuitions. Still, she couldn't shake the ominous feelings she had about the hole's seemingly innocent invitation to freedom. Her involvement with Les was still hanging, and the implications to her were that running away with Jason—to an uncertain future—would cause everyone too much heartache and confusion.

"No, Jason, I don't want to," she said after looking at him a long time. "I'm just not sure about what's out there—and besides I still have to handle this thing with Les."

Jason did not respond, but she could tell it hurt.

"I'm going tonight," he said finally.

Jason walked quietly away from the circle of people in which he was standing and stood once more before the opening in the wall. With only a slight hesitation he stepped through and into the mist. It was cold and damp. He stood still for a moment—waiting for the barrage of bullets and the sirens. But nothing happened—nothing at all. He moved forward a few feet. Silently the mist closed behind him. He was alone in a black, empty void. And still—nothing. The noise of the prisoners faded. He turned around but saw only the gently swirling mist. He looked down at his feet. He was standing on soft dirt. A few more steps forward. He realized that he had lost his sense of direction. His eyes were useless—everything was fog and mist. He put both hands up like a blind man feeling his way along. Fear tapped him on the shoulder, and suddenly all he wanted to do was go back to the security of the prison. But he didn't know where the prison was any longer. He wanted to scream or to run, but his mind seemed to be as still as the void he was in. He stood there on the edge of terror—waiting for something, anything, to happen. It seemed like forever when the fear began to

subside. Gradually a feeling of warmth replaced the coldness in his body. Just ahead of him he saw what appeared to be a light, first dim, then gradually brighter and brighter as the mist began to fade. As the light became brighter, he could see that he was standing at the edge of grassy ground covering. He saw a small, round boulder off to his left. He moved slowly to it and sat down. Apparently, he thought, he had been so frozen with fear that he had spent the night standing in the same place. His legs ached and the small of his back felt awful. The cold boulder, wet from the morning dew, felt like a luxurious armchair. He rubbed his eyes, red and sore from straining to see through the blackness. The dim grey light began to dispel more of the vapor, and the soft grass by the side of the rock on which he was sitting became an inviting bed. He slid off the rock and stretched out on the ground where he fell asleep.

The heat and glare of the sun finally woke him. Jason rolled over on his side and tried to go back to sleep, but the pain in his legs and back made their presence known. The sun was relentless. He opened one eye and looked at the day from ground level. The light blinded him at first. He sat up with his eyes closed. Using his hand as a visor, he slowly opened his eyes. A yawn caught him unaware and felt good. What Jason saw did not register at first. He was in the middle of a meadow with waving grass. Everything was in bloom. Off to his right was a small pond. Up and away to his left a rolling hill etched its green horizon against the sky. Clouds like carnations tumbled about in the clear blue heavens. A gentle breeze assured him. Ahead of him lay a grove of trees, alive with nature's dance. From the small wood came whispers of birds in delightful conversations. The air was caressed with an indescribable fragrance. Jason sat transfixed as the thought occurred that he was in the most beautiful spot in which he had ever been. A rush of joy tempered with serenity brought him to the edge of tears. A shudder of relief. The pain in his legs and back disappeared.

"Hello, friend." The voice cut through the morning quiet. Jason didn't know what to do. Buzzers and bells

in his head began to clang a mixture of horror and confusion. Was this it? Would they kill him now? Should he run?

"Don't be afraid, friend." The voice continued. It was the essence of peace. Slowly Jason twisted around and looked up. Jeans, soft flannel, and a crumpled hat, comfortably figured a man. His contact with Jason was lucid and warm and full of love. Jason did not relax.

"My name's Tom," the fellow said smiling.

"I see you made it okay. Some of them never get through the night. We saw you come out. We've been watching you a long time." He paused. "Hungry?"

Jason was confused, but his hunger wasn't. His hunger nodded, "Yes."

"Come then, we'll get you something to eat." Tom offered a hand to help Jason up. Jason just looked at it, then back to Tom.

"Well, come on." Tom's smile grew.

Jason stood up by himself, refusing the offer of help. It didn't seem to bother Tom at all.

"Jason, right?" Tom looked at him.

Jason nodded again. Nothing seemed to work in his mind. How did Tom know his name?

"Where am I?" Jason asked.

Tom laughed, "Right here."

"But where is the prison?"

"Just below that rise over there." Tom pointed in the same direction from which Jason supposed he had come.

"How did I get here?" asked Jason.

"You managed to inch along all night. Most of them do, although you probably don't remember it. Come with me. We'll get you some food, and I'll tell you the whole story." Tom motioned for Jason to follow him.

Jason stood there for a moment, and then resigning himself not to try to figure anything out, began to follow Tom along a path which wound through the field. They walked for some way and then finally, trudged up a grassy hill to Tom's cabin. It looked like a painting. Logs held together by thick white mortar. One large room inside with a loft for sleeping at one

end and a kitchen with an old wood stove at the other. A looped braided rug was on the hardwood floor. The front porch was raised a little off the ground, and from it Jason had seen a spectacular view of the countryside. Having walked for perhaps an hour in silence with Tom, Jason began to feel comfortable.

Tom indicated with a wave that the house was at Jason's disposal. "I'm going to see if I can find Janey. I'll be back soon." Tom walked out the screen door at the back of the cabin and disappeared.

The thoughts came in waves to Jason. He had never been in any place like this before. Who was Tom? How did he know Jason's name? Did he say he had come from the prison? Jason could find no answers, so he sat quietly in the straight-backed chair he had chosen and leaned his elbows on the table in front of him. There was nothing to do but just sit and see what happened next. At least he was free . . . or so it seemed. He wondered about Marie. Would he ever see her again? He hadn't realized how deep their relationship had grown in the short time before his escape. Escape. That seemed funny. He had just decided to go one night. No elaborate plans. Just the decision to be free. He wondered why Marie wouldn't come. If she could only see how it was. Maybe it was her attachment to Les. She had told him many times in their talks how dependent Les was on her, especially when Les would talk about his plans of being the prison leader. She had told Jason how much Les wanted to share his success. Success. There was another funny concept. What did that mean? Achieving something you want to achieve? If that was it, then, Jason thought, *he* had certainly been successful. He was out of the prison. He remembered talking to Charlie, one of the old-timers who had been through the hole and had come back. He would never forget the look Charlie gave him when he asked him about escape.

"Don't fool with it, Jason." Charlie had looked at him with blank terror at the thought. And no matter how hard Jason tried for specifics, Charlie wouldn't tell him any more than, "Don't do it." That as much as his desire for freedom may have served to sharpen

Jason's curiosity. His curiosity. Jason's curiosity had always been one of his prime motivating factors. He never would accept anything just on faith or on somebody's word. That had caused him a lot of suffering in the past. That's why it seemed odd to him that he was content to sit and wait for Tom to return. In the past Jason would have been demanding answers. But now, here, it felt like . . . how could he describe it to himself? He felt as if he didn't really have any questions.

"Hello, Jason. I see you made it." The lilting voice of a woman greeted him as she entered. She was alone.

"Hello, Janey," Jason said. The words startled him. How did he know that was Janey?

She was pretty, a simple clear look of purity and the same remarkable eyes that Tom had.

"I'll bet you're hungry," she said. A smile shone from her face.

Jason nodded. "Tom went to look for you. He'll be back soon, he said."

"Yes, I know. I only just now heard him calling. I've been wandering through my thoughts. Let me get you something to eat. We've been watching you ever since you were transferred," she said as she began to clatter about preparing some food.

Jason did not have the slightest idea how but he knew that Tom was approaching. The screen door swung open.

"I see you're being taken care of," he said to Jason with a smile. Tom walked over to Janey and hugged her—almost dispassionately, it seemed to Jason, and without a word. He sat down in the chair across the table from Jason. Janey walked over and set a bowl of steaming soup in front of him. Jason ate greedily with a wooden spoon. Janey occupied the other chair at the table and sat silently looking out the window at the noon glory. After Jason was finished, he picked his dish up and walked to the sink with it. He looked out the window by the stove. It was more of the same scenery. He was touched by a feeling of harmony and peace, unlike any he had known. He turned to Janey and Tom. They were both looking at him.

"Beautiful, isn't it?" Janey said.

Jason wanted to ask her a million questions, but none would form in his mind. He smiled at both of them.

Tom spoke. "Let's go sit on the front porch." He got up and walked to the door, holding it open as Janey and Jason walked past. They all sat in chairs placed in a semi-circle. Grandeur stretched before them.

"Which way is the prison from here?" asked Jason, after a while.

Tom pointed towards a low hill with a clump of trees on its top. "It's just below that hill, in a little valley." Tom looked at him. "I came from the prison myself."

"How long ago?" asked Jason.

Well, you see, Jason, here there is no time. 'How long' has no meaning."

Jason choked. No time? He stared into Tom's unflinching eyes. Did that mean he was dead, he thought.

"No, you're not dead, Jason."

"Can you read my mind?" Jason asked.

Tom looked at Janey, then back to Jason. "Mind reading is a little too limited a phrase to use, but the answer is 'yes.' "

Jason stared at both of them. What were these feelings he was having? Confusion but no specific questions came to him. Tom could read his mind. No time?

"I'm afraid I don't understand any of this," Jason said.

"You won't understand any of it in the way you have been used to understanding things. See, Jason, here we are beyond time, and beyond space. Do you remember how I answered your question, 'Where am I?' I said, 'Right here.' Remember?"

Jason nodded.

"The only place you ever *can* be is right here. In this place though, Jason, we all know that. The place you came from depended on other things to tell people where they were. Specifically, notions of space and time. It seems that the people in the prison have all sorts of

wonderful devices for measuring time and space. Because people get confused about where they are, they use space co-ordinates to tell them, and because they get confused about when it is, they use clocks to try to measure the infinite. Yet, even with all those interesting data, it is still only right now and we are never anywhere but right here. That is one of the first great gifts you will receive as part of your freedom—the understanding of that truth. But you see, Jason, along with the understanding of that truth comes a different sense of understanding as well. Up till now you've been believing that your understanding depended upon the amount of information you could gather. But that isn't understanding at all. That is merely observation."

"Wait." Jason stopped him. You say there is no space, but when I asked you where the prison was, you pointed over there. Isn't that a different space than here? I mean, what is this?" Jason swept his hand across the horizon.

Janey answered, "not so fast, Jason. It takes a little while to catch on. For right now let's just say that 'all this' is a manifestation of consciousness."

"Janey's right, Jason. Not so fast." Tom smiled at him. "Until your sense of understanding becomes better developed, it is best just to roll with things. Don't be afraid. You'll have all the answers you need. That's the nature of this business." Tom stopped and stared at Jason. Jason stared back.

"Well, I don't understand what you're saying at all."

"Words are fragile." It was again Janey who spoke. "But you will understand. Soon you will even be able to see that it was not your escape that has brought you these truths, but in fact it was these truths that made you free." She got up. "I'm going inside. Can I get anyone anything?"

Both of them said no.

"Is she your wife?" Jason asked Tom.

"She is my friend," he answered.

The evening approached with effortless precision. After much quiet reflection, Jason felt his adventure turning into weariness.

"May I sleep here tonight?" Jason asked.

"Yes, we have been expecting you." Tom's countenance was one of pure love.

"I don't know why, but I feel like you are my brother." Jason was embarrassed by the emotion.

"I am your friend." Tom smiled. Jason couldn't get rid of the feeling that he had been here forever.

As he sat by the fire that night, many mysteries began to unravel for Jason, and as he was dozing off to sleep, he was sure that he heard music.

It was still dark when Jason woke. He rolled up the pallet they had prepared for him and put it next to the fireplace. He walked out into the crisp night air. Nature's mood was heavy with change from night to morning. The sky looked silver. Jason stretched out on the grass by the front porch and gazed into the heavens. All the fears of the day before seemed distant. He lay contemplating the heaven with outstretched mind, and as the sky began to turn crimson from the dawn, he fell into the half-sleep of early morning.

This time the sun woke Jason gently. He looked around and saw Tom and Janey sitting on the front porch. Tom's telepathy surprised him again.

"Are you ready to go?" Tom looked at him peacefully. Jason had been thinking as he lay under the stars that he would like to see the prison from the outside. But without lingering on the astonishment, Jason replied, "Yes."

Tom strode from the front porch and started down the slope. Janey said good-bye to them both, although not out loud.

After they had walked silently for a while, Tom spoke. "I think you are going to be surprised." Jason wanted to ask him what he meant but decided not to. "You'll see what I mean," Tom said looking straight ahead with a grin.

Jason stood motionless at the top of the hill where they had stopped. He was surprised all right. There in the most lush of valleys, green and fertile and cool, stood the prison. The prison? Jason laughed inside. There were all the beds lined neatly in rows, standing in the open field. There were people moving about. Off

to one side was the dining hall with its long tables. There was the exercise yard with clusters of people. But there were no walls . . . no walls anywhere. And yet the people in the prison continued to move around just as if there were. Opening imaginary doors and closing them. There were the solitary cells. Each occupant stood not six feet away from his neighbor, separated from him by absolutely nothing. It would have been comic had not the tragic expressions on the faces of many of the captives spoken so harshly of the reality they saw.

"It's not a prison at all!" Jason said.

They stood quietly for a long time. Then Tom spoke. "Would you like to get a closer look?" he asked.

"Won't they see us?" Jason was anxious at the thought of being captured. But the thought stopped there. How could he be a captive in a prison with no walls?

"No," Tom replied. "They see nothing but darkness and mist beyond the walls." He walked down the hill, and Jason followed.

"This is the west wall." Tom was tracing an imaginary line in front of him. "And the opening is just about—here." He had walked a few feet and stopped. One of the inmates passed casually not three yards in front of Tom. Jason was nervous, but it was as Tom had said. Apparently the prisoner couldn't see him. Jason watched the activity "inside" as the prisoners shuffled about their dull day. As he looked into their faces, he could see the strain. Even though some of them were smiling, they were smiles grasping at mirth and contained no real joy. He saw Marie walk into the exercise yard from the dining hall. She looked prettier to him than he remembered her. It could have been absence that made her seem more lovely, or it could have been the fact that Jason saw she was really free. Whatever it was, Jason was glad to see her.

"Is there any way to talk to one of them?" Jason asked Tom.

"Not unless you go back in." Tom knew what Jason had in mind. "Returning to the prison is not uncommon. Almost all of us have gone back for a visit.

But there are some things I must tell you."

Jason listened to Tom without taking his eyes off Marie.

"First, about the guards." Tom's tone was pedantic. "They are prisoners themselves just like all the rest. What you believed was a 'head-count' every evening was simply the guards noticing things, but without a standard by which to judge. They will pose no problem. If you want to stay the night, just find an empty cell. No one will say anything to you.

"And, second, about moving around. Seeing that there are no walls will allow you to walk wherever you please. If you were to walk across this line," Tom described one on the ground with his hand, "which to them is a wall, you would suddenly pop into their view. But, since it is not logical to them that such a thing could happen, they will not notice it. They will simply begin to see you from where you appear. But this can cause some confusion if, while in conversation, you disappear and re-appear on the other side of a door or wall. It makes dialogue discontinuous and difficult."

"Both of these things are simple enough to deal with as long as you are conscious of them. However, the next point can be dangerous if you let it. After you have been back for a while, the walls of the prison may re-appear to you." Tom waited for the importance to register. Jason looked at him, concerned.

"There is no cause for worry," Tom continued, "because as you can see, the reality of the situation is that there is no prison. Still, once you are inside that world, the suggestion of bondage is very strong. If you find yourself seeing the prison again, you must immediately return to the truth with your thought. Knowing the truth about your freedom is the only salvation you have when you are confronted with information which would capture you and keep you locked in. The hole, of course, is always there—but as you know, it involves much suffering. Your ability to think clearly about the non-reality of the prison is all you need. That ability exists because it is based on reality—your freedom. Do not let a contrary suggestion convince you otherwise."

Jason heard the last of Tom's speech with some feelings of fear.

"I will not meet you when you return. You know the way to the cabin by yourself now. Go in peace and settle your unfinished business. Janey and I are with you in thought. And keep a firm embrace about the pillar of truth. It is your freedom." Tom smiled at him and turned and walked away.

Jason stepped forward into the prison. He walked quickly across the exercise yard and approached Marie from behind. She was standing alone.

"Hello, Marie," he said softly.

"Jason!" she said before turning around. They embraced long and hard the way re-united lovers do.

"I thought I would never see you again. I was sure you were dead." Marie brushed the tears away. "I'm so glad you're back!" She hugged him again.

"Marie, I have the most wonderful thing to tell you." Jason smiled at her. "You are free!" Jason was bursting with joy at bearing such glad tidings. Marie looked at him, puzzled.

"You're free. This isn't a prison." Jason waited for the reaction. Marie smiled a half-smile.

"Why that's wonderful, Jason," she said. Jason could see she didn't know what he was talking about.

"Marie, I'm serious. Look. See this." Jason walked to the wall between the kitchen and exercise yard. "This isn't a wall." As he reached out to touch the wall, he was stopped by his own horror. The wall. He could see the wall himself. He spun around. Thoughts began to race through his mind. Is this what Tom meant? Would he get trapped again? Tom's words came to him. "You must immediately return to the truth with your thought." Jason was terrified. He realized he had taken Tom's instruction too lightly. What did "return to the truth" *mean*? How was he supposed to do that? He felt as if he were being crushed between panic and desperation. He wrestled violently with his thinking as it careened out of control. By sheer force of will he tried to pull his thought away from the wall. He tried to think of anything but the wall— but nothing came except more fear. He looked at Marie, unable to speak.

CHAPTER TWO

"Jason, I don't think I know what you're talking about." Marie looked like a little girl examining a curious insect.

Jason looked at her, then at the wall again. It was easy, when there was no evidence of the wall, to talk of freedom. But here it was in front of him, solid stone. Then a thought came to him, "But you know better than that. Just a moment ago, out there with Tom, you could see that there was no wall. There is no wall." That same peaceful feeling that he had had before entering the prison began to rise in him again. "There is no wall." The thought gave him the courage to refuse the sense input he was getting. "I know better," he thought. "I really do know better. There is no wall." Then peace came over him in a wave. The wall disappeared from his view. He stood looking at the rows of tables lined up in the grassy field again. He smiled.

"Jason? Are you all right?" Marie was concerned.

"Yes. Yes, I'm all right," he said. "Let's walk over here. Perhaps I had better start from the beginning."

They walked over to a corner of the exercise yard, and Jason sat down on a nice grassy spot. Marie leaned against a wall across from him, which Jason didn't see.

Jason thought that the thing to do was to try as best he could to tell Marie everything that had happened. They talked long into the afternoon.

"And so," said Jason, "I want you to come with me. Will you?"

Marie didn't know what to do. She did not doubt most of Jason's tale, though the last part about there being no prison seemed too fantastic for her.

"I don't know, Jason. It all sounds different than anything I have ever heard."

"I know it does, but I'm telling you the truth. Right here, right now. You are free."

"But, Jason," she said, "if I'm free right now, right here, why don't we just stay here? The prison doesn't bother me that much. And if you feel as if you're free, it shouldn't bother you either."

Jason recounted Tom's words about the re-appearance of the walls. He finished, "Will you come?"

"I'd have to tell Les. I couldn't just leave like that."

The fact that she was considering coming allowed Jason to overlook whatever potential trouble Les's reaction might cause.

"When do you want to go?" she asked.

"Just as soon as possible. I only came back for you."

"I can't do it that fast, Jason. Give me til tomorrow night. I'll talk to Les tonight." She was resigned to go with him.

That evening, Les and Marie sat at dinner, crowded among the other inmates. Les noticed that Marie was distant.

"Is something wrong?" he asked her.

"Les, I have to talk to you." Marie stood up. "Let's go outside."

"But you didn't finish eating." Les stood up with her.

"I can't eat. Let's go into the yard." She took her tray to the return window and walked outside past the stern eye of the guard.

"What is it, Marie? I can tell something is really bothering you." They were walking slowly together in the night.

"Jason's back, Les," Marie said, stopping and looking at him. Les felt it coming.

"Les, I'm in love with him." The words hurt, she could tell. But she went on quickly trying to make it through without crying. "He wants me to go through the wall with him." Les tried to interrupt but she went on. "And I told him I would. I felt it was fair to at least tell you." She stopped. She was relieved that she had got it all out. Les was stunned.

"You can't be serious," he said. "he wants you to go through the wall? I mean, you *can't* be serious."

"I'm very serious, Les. I love him. He says that things are different than they seem, and once outside the wall, things become clear. I can't help the way I

feel. I'm sorry if it hurts you, but that's my decision. I hope someday you'll understand." They stood there looking at each other without saying anything. The night bell sounded. Les turned and walked away. Marie burst into tears. It should be easier than that, she thought. Why does somebody always seem to get hurt? Walking back to her cell, she paused for a moment beside one of the walls. She rubbed it with her hand. It was cold and rough.

Jason spent most of the next day walking into and out of the prison. "How simple," he thought. "no one says anything to me. All that fear about the guards was wasted." And indeed it was, for the guards watched blankly as Jason would disappear and re-appear. It was as Tom had said. The guards were prisoners themselves.

As night began, Jason saw Marie approaching. She was carrying a bundle of clothing and did not look happy.

"Hi," Jason said, trying not to notice Marie's despondency.

"Hello, Jason. I'm ready." Her words came through mock courage.

"You don't sound too happy," Jason said, wanting to help. Are you afraid?"

"A little, I guess." She sighed. "But I'm really upset about Les."

"Would you rather not go?" Jason asked. He was serious. He didn't want to force Marie into anything.

"No, I want to go with you, Jason. I really do love you. But it makes me sad to see Les unhappy." Marie looked down at her feet, then at Jason. "But, Jason, I love you and want to be with you."

In a way Jason didn't like what he was hearing. If Marie was coming just because of him, it might not be the best way. It seemed to Jason that she should want to be free whether he was involved or not.

"Marie, I'm not so sure that you coming with me is a good idea if you're not sure about it," Jason said, unhappy that he hadn't said exactly what he meant.

"No, Jason. I'm sure. Let's go. There's no use talking about Les anyway. What's done is done. Come

on." She stepped forward, twisting her shoulders to get through the opening. Jason followed her. A few yards beyond the wall, Jason looked up at the beautiful clear sky. The moon was shining so brightly that he could see to avoid the large rocks in their path. Marie was just in front of him and she stopped suddenly. Jason bumped into the back of her. She gave a little cry.

"Jason," she said weakly.

"I'm right here," he said, holding onto her shoulders.

She turned around and faced him.

"It's so dark. I'm beginning to get frightened. I didn't think it would be this dark. I've never seen fog this thick. I can hardly see you." There was the first hint of panic in her voice. Jason had never seen such a clear night. Then he realized that the fog and the mist that had greeted him when he left must be just as the prison walls. No substance except in belief.

"It's okay, Marie. I know how it is. I spent my first night out here in the mist. You must trust me when I tell you everything is fine. I can see quite well. Let me get in front of you." He walked passed her. When he did, he was too far from her for her to see him. He had disappeared into the mist.

"Jason!" Marie cried out. She was very afraid. "Jason, where are you?"

"Right here." He reached out and took her hand and faced her.

"Oh, Jason. It's awful. I can't see at all. Don't leave me again." She began to cry.

"Don't cry. Marie, don't cry." What useless advice, he thought. "I promise you everything is all right."

She was still crying little controlled sobs of fear, and Jason put his arms around her and stood there for a few moments, stroking her hair. His comfort made her feel better, and after a while she stopped crying.

"Now then. Take my hand and just follow me. I'll get us to a place where we can sit down." Jason walked forward. Marie clutched his hand so tightly that she hurt him. After only a few steps, Marie said, "Jason. Please, Jason. Let's stop. I'm terribly afraid."

"But, Marie. I'm telling you it's all right. Just stay close behind me and we'll . . ."

She cut him off irritably, "It's not all right for *me*, Jason. It may be fine to you, but it's not to me." As she spoke, she stepped a half step forward, and catching her foot on a rock, fell down.

Jason kneeled beside her. She broke again into a flood of tears. Jason said nothing but held her hand tightly. She buried her face into his chest and gave over to more crying. Jason was frustrated. To him it was clear as morning. He saw only the brilliance and beauty of the crystal-like moonlight. He didn't know what to do to comfort her. He sat there holding her tightly as she cried herself to sleep in his arms.

At last Marie awoke to the morning. She squinted as the sunlight blinded her. Jason was sitting up beside her.

"Good morning," he said. "At least you spent your first night lying down."

Marie rolled over and sat up. She looked out at the greenfields and the spectacular beauty of the day. She turned and looked back at the prison. She stared for a long time as if she were peering through a dusty windowpane.

"Well?" said Jason. "How do you feel?" He was pleased they had made it.

"Fine, I guess," she replied. She was still staring at the prison.

"You see? No prison." Jason was alive with pride of revelation. But Marie did not respond.

"Well?" Jason wanted Marie to react somehow other than she was. "Tell me what you think now."

"I don't know." Marie said hesitantly. I don't know. I think I see what you mean. Sometimes it looks as if there are no walls, and then sometimes I'm not sure."

Jason was surprised. He certainly hadn't expected that. He started to press the issue but decided not to say anything. Marie stood up and looked around. Jason waited to see her face light up with recognition, but she held onto the same puzzled semi-frown.

"I see it all Jason," she said after some time. "But I'm not sure I believe it. Then when I think I believe it, I don't see it anymore. What is it? Where are we?"

"Right here." Jason had spoken without thinking.

"I know that. Where is here? Where are we? That's what I want to know." She waited for him to answer. But Jason was dumbstruck.

He tried to think of something to say. "I don't know anything more but that we are right here. I don't know how to tell you where 'here' is except 'right here.' " Jason had a sinking feeling. The communication that existed so exquisitely between Marie and him in the prison didn't seem to be working anymore.

"It doesn't make sense." Marie had the same feeling that Jason had. Why couldn't they talk? Jason stood up beside her.

"Come on, let's walk to the cabin. Maybe things will clear up some by then," Jason said. He hoped that the walk through the countryside would let Marie see or at least feel the place they were in. But Marie hit hard.

"What cabin?" There was a razor edge to her voice. "What cabin, Jason? Where are we? You don't know, do you? No, Jason, let's not go anywhere. I think I may have made a very big mistake. Nothing is any clearer out here than it was inside the prison. Why did you make me come with you? If this is all there is and you don't even know where we are, then why wouldn't you stay with me in the prison?" Somehow Marie had gotten angry. Jason looked at her with a feeling of total desperation but was unable to do anything.

"But, Marie. Just look around. Look at all this. Don't you *feel* different?" Jason was grasping at anything. Marie looked at him angrily but gained control before she spoke.

"No, Jason, I don't," she said softly. I'm not sure what all this is. But I don't feel anything except that I want to go back." She waited a moment looking at him. Jason decided not to react.

"Jason, I came here because I thought I loved you. But nothing is very clear to me now. Not even that. I can only be honest with you. The only thing I do know is that I have spent one of the most terrifying nights of my life here. Sometimes I think I see the

prison, and then I'm not sure. But if last night is the way it is out here, then I want to get back to the prison before it disappears altogether. I can't lie to you and tell you everything is all right when it's not, Jason. You wouldn't want me to do that. Come back with me. The prison's not so bad. We can do what we want. I've told Les about us so we won't have to hide. Come back with me, Jason. Please. I don't want to stay here." She had spoken quietly and with conviction. Jason felt hurt at first, but then a wave of compassion came over him. His eyes filled with love.

"I understand Marie," he said. "It was wrong of me to bring you here. But I can't go back with you. There exists for me now a peace and harmony that I have never had before. I do love you—but I see now that I can love you even if we aren't together. It was selfish of me to ask you to come here. I'm sorry for that. You go back if you must."

They stood a while and then Marie reached out and kissed Jason lightly.

"I can't tell you I see if I don't," she said.

"I understand. Take care. I love you." Jason felt very peaceful which surprised him some. He had said only a few sad good-byes before, and they had always hurt.

Marie sensed the finality in his voice and knew that further discussion would be useless. She felt victimized by the circumstance. She could do nothing but what she felt was honest, and her honesty demanded that she return to the prison with or without Jason. She was sad. She loved Jason and did not want to leave him. And yet, she knew that to try to build a relationship with him founded on less than total honesty was flirtation with disaster. She walked back to the wall and then turned to face him for a second. Then she walked through the opening and away from him. When she thought she was safely hidden from view, she sat down on the ground and cried and cried. She didn't know that Jason was still watching.

His sadness faded and his sense of loss vanished like the nonexistent prison walls. There was no bitterness.

His love did not diminish. It was love that was overcoming his sorrow. He was in a remarkable state of consciousness.

He found himself at the cabin without thinking. For a few moments he stood on the porch surveying the splendor that lay before him. The sky was purple and orange and pink. The hills were velvet green. There was no sound. The door opened and Tom walked out. He didn't say a word, yet Jason understood what he wished to communicate. They conversed without speaking.

"I am glad to see that you feel well." It came from Tom. "I knew that Marie wouldn't come and hoped you would work through that quickly. Her freedom is inevitable, but it will come in her own way." Jason loved Tom. But he had begun to experience a state of consciousness that was beyond having-to-have-someone to love. Or someone to love him in return. He had begun to experience the essence of pure love. Without boundary, without change. A love that did not vary from person to person. A love so secure that evil withered before it. A love that existed as much a part of his consciousness as his name.

Tom broke the silent conversation by saying out loud, "Let's go inside."

They walked inside and Jason saw two small carpet bags on the floor. They were packed with some soft clothing. The cabin was neat and freshly scrubbed.

"You're leaving?" Jason asked, surprised.

"Yes, Jason. It's time that we go." Janey answered. "There are places on beyond where we have yet to serve. We leave this cabin as it was left to us. Someday you will pass it along."

Jason fell a little. He was disappointed they were leaving. He felt a twinge of fear. He suddenly felt locked in his own thoughts.

"Don't be afraid," Tom said. "Each moment is unfolding as it should. You can never be without an answer. You will begin from this day as a guide, and help others along as we have helped you."

They all sat at the table. Tom continued.

"I know that now you are not sure what your activities should be as a guide, and so I will set forth

some rules to follow. But these things I give you as rules are only rules because of your present development—in reality they are not mere rules, they are inviolable law against which no transgression *can* be made—regardless of evidence.

"You have learned one of the "rules" already from Marie. Do not teach those who do not wish to be taught. Until one is ready to see this state, one cannot. Trying to pull them through only confuses them.

"There are other beings out here whom you have not met. As you discover them, remember the value of truth. Always be impeccably honest. Search thought constantly for half-truths and subtle lies. The truth is pure and absolute and is the basis of spiritual power.

"Lean upon Love. It is the principle of existence. Not ordinary selfish love, but the love you felt as you walked home. This love expresses itself actively in the very face of discord. The purity of love dispells hate. Sometimes you may feel that you cannot love. That is false ego. Your true nature *is* love. Do not hate. Love shines forth without effort.

"Guard yourself against the belief that evil has a power of its own. Fear does not exist unless you allow it to, and even then it has no power. You will learn at length how to withdraw from the senses' suggestion that external objects have a reality of their own to which you may be subject. Turn thought away from the clamor of these sense data, then trust the voice that speaks to you in stillness. When you have finally removed what you are observing from what you are thinking, a light will guide you through all difficulties. Do not get trapped into believing a lie about your identity.

"As you stay here, many people will seem to come under your care. Do not develop false responsibility for them. It is their own unfoldment that brings them to you and will ultimately carry them on. Be as a lamp in the window for these travelers."

Jason did not understand all of what Tom had said. Something began to bother him. He thought of the terrible moment when the wall had re-appeared to

him. He had not known how to hold his thoughts to the truth as Tom had told him. He realized that he didn't know *how* to do anything Tom had told him.

"Tom, I understand what you are saying to do is right. But I don't know how to do it," he said.

"That is a difficulty that confronts us all," said Tom. "I can explain it this way. You are presently full and complete. Your existence as idea is immortal and eternal. A principle is operating now, assuring life and revelation. Reflect upon the truths I have given you. The pure understanding of any one of them reveals the nature of individual practice and provides each new message as it is needed—as you are able to understand it. You are not a blind, stumbling, finite being seeking help. You are infinite idea, charged and alive with the power of its completeness. Only a belief to the contrary would try to keep you bound. Cease such belief. Do not speculate or contemplate about why you have such a belief. Yield it up. That is all I can tell you. You and I are in the same place that you and Marie were in, outside the prison. Sometimes accepting the truth is very difficult. But be assured that it is presently understood as part of individuality."

"We must go now. Good-bye, Jason," Janey said as she stood up and hugged him. Tom had picked up the bags and was holding the front door open with his shoulder.

"Good-bye. Thank you," Jason said. He looked deep into Tom's eyes and felt his peace. A question popped into his mind, and he said without thinking, "Tom, when will I understand?" He felt foolish the moment he said it.

Tom smiled patiently and without rebuke. "I will tell you what Simpson, my guide, told me when I asked the same question. The nature of the infinite is timeless. You believe now that growth occurs through time. But as we grow to an understanding of the infinite, one of the first things we see is that we have been there all along. It's like the prison. You were free all the time and just didn't know it."

Jason nodded. Tom grinned broadly. Janey and Tom walked down the hill. The sky was brilliant purple. Jason waved good-bye to their backs and turned and went inside.

THE END